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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Accelerated Schools Project, which was begun at Stanford University in 1986 to improve schools for children caught in at-risk situations. The first sections describe the present deficiencies of schools serving at-risk students and the limitations of general reform proposals for educating at-risk youth. The Accelerated Schools Project focuses on creating learning activities characterized by high expectations and high status for its participants. Its goal at the elementary level is to enable all students to take advantage of mainstream secondary education instruction by effectively closing the achievement gap in elementary school. Its three guiding principles include unity of purpose, empowerment, and building on strengths. Program values include equity, participation, communication/community, reflection, experimentation, trust, and risk-taking. The Inquiry Process is a mechanism for moving the school toward accelerate practice along all three dimensions of the model--curriculum, instructional practices, and organization. The five stages in initiating the process include: (1) focus on the real problem; (2) brainstorm solutions; (3) synthesize solutions into an experimental program; (4) pilot the test program; and (5) evaluate. Administrators' new roles revolve around coordination, motivation, and support. Pilot schools have demonstrated the following early outcomes: improved student achievement, increased parent participation, improved student attendance, and a decrease in discipline problems. One figure is included. (LMI)

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ACCELERATED SCHOOLS

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August 1990

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ACCELERATED SCHOOLS

In this paper, we provide a rationale for Accelerated Schools. We begin by describing the present deficiencies of schools serving students in at-risk situations. We then describe some of the general reform proposals for better educating youth at-risk and the limitations of these proposals. Finally, we provide a detailed description of accelerated schooling along with strategies for moving from the present situation to an accelerated one.

HOW TO PRODUCE EDUCATIONAL FAILURE: THE FAMILIAR MODEL

Many students are educationally at-risk because they begin school with learning gaps in areas valued by schools and mainstream economic and social institutions. Assuming these students will not be able to maintain a normal instructional pace without prerequisite knowledge and learning skills, schools provide such youngsters with remedial or compensatory educational services. Schools' compensatory education programs usually demand less of students instructionally and pull students out of their regular classrooms or adapt regular classrooms to their "needs." This approach appears to be both rational and compassionate, but it has exactly the opposite effect.

First, this process reduces learning expectations on the parts of both the children and the educators who are assigned to teach them, and it stigmatizes both groups with a label of inferiority. Such a stigma undermines social support for the activity, denotes a low social status to the participants, and imparts negative self-images for the participants. The combination of low social status and low expectations is tantamount to treating such students as discards who are marginal to the mainstream educational agenda. Thus, the approach creates the unhealthiest of all possible conditions under which to expect significant educational progress. In contrast, an effective approach must focus on creating learning activities which are characterized by high expectations and high status for the participants.

Second, the usual treatment of low achievers is not designed to bring students up to the point where they can benefit from mainstream instruction and perform at grade-level. The sad fact is that once students are assigned to remedial classes, they seldom graduate to the mainstream. This is because compensatory and remedial classes move at a slower than "normal" pace, making the children fall farther and farther behind their more advantaged fellow students. The result is that once a

student is relegated to remedial or compensatory interventions, that student will be expected to learn at a slower rate, and the achievement gap between mainstream and low achieving students will grow. A successful program must set a deadline for closing the achievement gap so that, ultimately, *all* children will be able to benefit from mainstream instruction.

Third, by deliberately slowing the pace of instruction to a crawl, instruction heavily emphasizes endless repetition of material through drill-and-practice exercises. Exposure to concepts, analysis, problem-solving, and interesting applications is largely proscribed on the premise that children must learn rote skills before they can try anything more challenging or stimulating. Mechanics are stressed over content and student involvement. Consequently, these students' school experience lacks intrinsic vitality, omits crucial learning skills and reinforcement, and moves at a plodding pace that reinforces low expectations. Such a joyless experience further negates the child's feelings about school and diminishes the possibility that the child will view the school as a positive environment in which he or she can learn. An effective curriculum for those considered to be low achievers must not only be faster paced and actively engage the interests of children to enhance their motivation, but it must also include concepts, analysis, problem-solving, and interesting applications.

Fourth, most compensatory educational programs do not draw upon the great potential of teachers, parents, and community resources. Schools do not utilize parents as potentially positive influences for their children's learning. Furthermore, the professional staff at the school level does not usually participate in the important educational decisions that it must ultimately implement. Such an omission means that teachers must implement programs which do not necessarily reflect their professional judgments, a condition which is not likely to spur great enthusiasm. The design and implementation of successful educational programs to address the needs of the educationally at-risk will require the involvement of parents, the use of community resources, and the extensive participation of teachers in designing the interventions that they will implement.

HOW REFORMS CAN FAIL STUDENTS IN AT-RISK SITUATIONS

We clearly are not on the right track to meeting the challenges of students caught in at-risk situations. Although the nation initiated an educational reform dialogue during the 1980s in an effort to remain internationally competitive (e.g. National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983; U.S. Department of Education 1984), attempts at reform have not successfully addressed the specific needs of students in at-risk situations. Consequently, educators continue to search for solutions in the 1990s. Moreover, the reforms have not changed long-held attitudes, meanings, and beliefs that prevail in inner city and poor rural schools. It is useful to explore two types of reform that have made generic claims for improving the education of all students while ignoring the needs of those we call "at-risk."

Raising the Standards

Extensive reforms that were advocated by national commissions and adopted by state legislatures in the 1980s sought to raise standards at the secondary level, without providing additional resources or new strategies to help low achieving students meet the higher standards (National Commission for Excellence in Education 1983; National Coalition of Advocates for Students 1985). Such reforms failed to address not only the challenges facing children at-risk, but may have actually exacerbated the problem. Ernest Boyer (1988) summarizes this criticism as follows:

> The harsh truth is that school reform is failing in the inner city because the diagnosis is wrong. Formulas for renewal—more homework, more testing, more requirements for graduation—work best for schools that are already succeeding and for students who are college bound. But to require a troubled student in an urban ghetto to take another unit in math or foreign language, without more guidance or support, is like raising a hurdle in the high jump without giving more coaching to someone who has stumbled.

Thus, it is not surprising that the status of those students at the bottom of the achievement charts has not improved under the latest reforms. Successful strategies for improving the educational plight of children at-risk should begin at the elementary level and be dedicated to preparing children for doing high quality work in secondary school. Simply raising standards at the secondary level without

changing the way schools operate so that students can reach the new standards, is likely to increase their chances of dropping out (McDill, Natriello, and Pallas 1985).

The Patchwork Approach

A second stage of reform has produced a wide range of unrelated change initiatives aimed at improving the educational practices within inner-city and poor rural schools. In implementing these reforms, educators have drawn upon research on effective schooling practices to create an agenda for restructuring the schools. However, due to the dearth of time, resources, and information, the results of this approach tend to be disjointed and unsystematic.

Administrators, principals, and teachers are reaching out for whatever programs they can (e.g. computer-assisted instruction, cooperative learning, extended day programs) without planning and integrating these strategies into a larger vision. Most schools do not have the time, support, or capacity to think through carefully what particular problem they need a solution for or how that solution fits together with other school efforts. In a typical situation, the district superintendent attends a conference where she hears reports of substantial gains associated with a computer-assisted program for remedial reading; she purchases computers and software and arranges with the program developers to conduct workshops for her staff. Or, a principal in the district finds reports of a successful peer tutoring program in his professional journal; he instructs his third and fourth grade teachers to attend a training session and implement the program. Or, a second grade teacher listens to a colleague from a nearby district tout the remarkable effects of a new math curriculum; she convinces her principal to buy the program's teacher manual and kit of manipulatives. Struggling to improve upon present practice, well-intentioned educators draw upon any and all promising models and add them on to the existing practices in their schools without thinking about how they fit together – let alone about what unifying purpose they address.

LIMITATIONS OF THE REFORM MOVEMENTS

"How can it be...," wonders Larry Cuban, "that so much school reform has taken place over the last century yet schooling appears to be pretty much the same as it has always been (Cuban 1988)?" The answer to Cuban's question, and the key to eliciting lasting and meaningful change in the schools, lies in the inextricable connection between educational practice and the school *culture* in which these

practices come to life. Practices cannot change without deeper transformations in the attitudes, meanings, and beliefs of schooling.

The present set of attitudes, meanings, and beliefs that prevail in schools serving youth at-risk are indicative of a technocratic mindset. Educators adopting the technocratic model view schooling as a "controlled experiment in which the teacher-technician brings some scientifically determined and generalizable technique to bear upon the student-subject (Eisner 1983)." Teaching is treated as a mechanical process that can be perfected with the aid of science.

While effective programs have resulted from this model, the following undesired outcomes may result from rigid adherence to the technocratic mindset:

- Teachers will be viewed as technicians, rather than professionals. They will lose both the freedom and inspiration to adjust to the different situations they face in varied classrooms.

- Coursework will tend to emphasize facts and competencies, rather than more intellectually stimulating material.

- Schools will teach in ways that do not necessarily line up with the strengths, knowledge, weaknesses, desires, and interests of the staff, parents, and students.

- Schools will care more about outputs (generally standardized and cognitive), than the intrinsic value of the process. No one will know how well students understand concepts or whether they can apply them in ways that are useful to themselves and others.

- Knowledge will become external to students in that it will be something they memorize, rather than something they create.

While the deadening effects of the technocratic mindset can be found throughout the educational system, they are particularly prevalent in schools serving poor and minority children. Students at-risk are more likely than their mainstream counterparts to receive remedial instruction characterized by a focus on mechanics and repetition (Levin 1988). More colloquially, "*Smart kids* get to participate; *remedial kids* get to memorize (Fine 1988)." This observation is corroborated in a study that compares pedagogical beliefs and instructional practices within schools serving working class, middle class, or upper class students (Anyon 1981). Students in an upper middle class community believed that knowledge comes "from your head" and that "you make it in your brain[,]" but students in the

working class schools thought that knowledge came from outside their own lives—from books, or the teacher, or the Board of Education (Anyon 1981).

The case can also be made that teachers serving poor and minority children likewise tend to be supervised more rigidly than their colleagues in middle class schools. This can be seen in various state legislatures' attempts to exert greater control on curriculum and instruction (Cuban 1986). Higher test scores in most middle class schools provide teachers with the "academic protection" necessary to experiment with innovative approaches without unwanted intrusions. Teachers in the relatively lower scoring inner-city or poor rural schools, however, lack this protection and will more likely feel the force of legislative mandates. For example, if a state legislature mandates higher standards as a reform effort for all schools, the pressures on urban and poor rural district superintendents will be tremendous. In an effort to assuage public pressures, central offices push technocratic processes on schools as the quickest and least risky of vehicles to raise achievement. In a similar effort to relieve themselves of central office pressures, teachers resort to "teaching to the tests" using such methods as worksheets, vocabulary lists, and drill-and-practice.

Full adherence to the technocratic model extracts all power from the school through endless mandates and regulations from "above." Principals and teachers are so busy trying to meet the mandates that they have little or no chance to exercise professional discretion. Yet, the process of education is situated with teachers at the school site. That is, students attend schools, not central offices and interact with teachers, not curriculum supervisors. Technocratic mandates tear at the very heart of the educational system by removing from school site staff any sense of responsibility for educating our nation's children.

Some schools, however, rise above the load of mandates and regulations and take the risk of adopting new programs on their own. While these programs may be useful and effective, they end up as "add-ons" to a school's curriculum, instruction, ***or*** organization. Limited time and resources coupled with great pressures to raise test scores do not allow schools to coordinate deep, long-lasting, and comprehensive changes to curriculum, instruction, ***and*** organization. When members of the school community seek to improve the school, they typically focus on only one of these three areas, which results in the patchwork approach above.

But changes in one area of the school program generally demand changes in other areas. For example, a school concerned with improving student performance on reading tests will not reach its goals simply by changing curriculum. To be

effective, a new curriculum will likely demand new modes of instruction and might require staff re-organization to enable some teachers to receive more training.

This interdependence implies that change must move forward simultaneously on three fronts—curriculum, instruction, and organization. Few add-on programs addressing only one of these three dimensions are successful for any significant length of time. Funding runs out, or a key personality leaves the school. At that point, the program often dies because the school never developed the supportive structures to accept fully and build on the new program. Thomas R. Guskey (1990) offers a similar view regarding the patchwork approach when he posits that school improvement strategies must be carefully and systematically integrated in order for substantial learning improvements to occur.

Moreover, add-on programs do not affect the all important culture and attitude of schools including beliefs about communication among staff, reflection, and the spirit of risk-taking. Although ambitious, only a totally comprehensive approach toward reforming a school's culture as well as its curriculum, instruction, and organization will foster and enable valuable and long-lasting school change.

ACCELERATED SCHOOLS AS A RESPONSE

The Accelerated Schools Project is a comprehensive approach to school change begun at Stanford University in 1986 to improve schooling for children caught in at-risk situations. The Accelerated Schools Project is both a way of thinking about academic acceleration and a concrete process for achieving it. Each Accelerated School sets its own unique goals, and the Accelerated Schools Project helps provide the capacity-building and guidance to reach those goals. Designed as an alternative to present practice, the Accelerated Schools Project builds on the knowledge base that argues in favor of a different set of assumptions for achieving school success for all students (Edmonds 1979; Levin 1987 & 1988; Slavin 1987). At its heart is the notion of doing for low achieving students what we presently attempt to do for gifted and talented students, striving to accelerate their progress rather than slow it down. The goal of the Accelerated Schools Project at the elementary level is to enable all students to take advantage of mainstream secondary education instruction by effectively closing the achievement gap in elementary school.

To accomplish this, schools must change radically. Schools should display the following characteristics: high expectations on the part of teachers, parents, and students; deadlines by which students are expected to meet particular educational

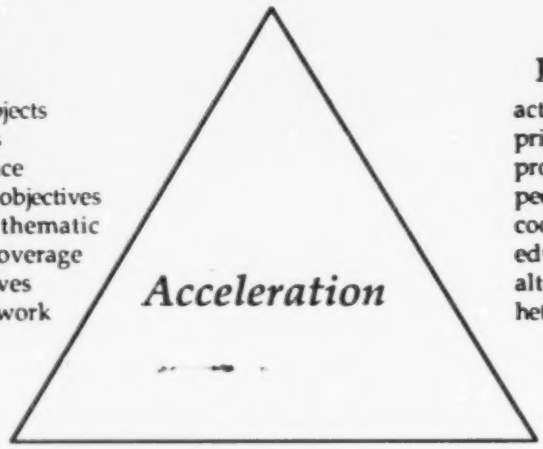
requirements; stimulating and relevant instructional programs; and involvement of the teachers, parents, and the community in the design and implementation of programs. We will describe these characteristics more fully in the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter 4. The Accelerated School approach is also expected to create a strong sense of self-worth and educational accomplishment for students who may now feel rejected by schools and frustrated about their own abilities. Students with stronger self-esteem, we believe, are less likely to seek such harmful activities as dropping out or drug use. Finally, the accelerated approach is based on a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs that together guide the push towards raising the achievement of all students.

No one single feature makes an accelerated program. Rather, a comprehensive integration of curricular, instructional, and organizational practices, consistent with a school's unique vision, creates the Accelerated School. While the Accelerated School process is not prescriptive and each school will differ according to its unique needs, every Accelerated Elementary School should aim to bring all children to into the educational mainstream by a set deadline and should adhere to a core of curricular, instructional, and organizational practices.

The entire *curriculum* of an Accelerated School should be enriched and emphasize language development in all subjects—math and science included. Instead of treating students as the objects of their education, Accelerated Schools should make students the subjects of their own education. Schools can accomplish this by using interesting applications tied to students' cultures and their every day experiences. Accelerated curricula should also focus on problem-solving and higher order analytical skills. Finally, Accelerated Schools should have common curricular objectives for all students.

Instructional practices within the Accelerated School should promote active learning experiences. For example, students should construct, experiment, and discover. They should become teachers and helpers of fellow students through cross-age tutoring and cooperative learning, which have been shown to be especially effective with low achieving students (Slavin and Madden 1989). Teachers should serve as facilitators of student activities rather than the sole givers of knowledge. Finally, since the assessment of student achievement is a key instructional tool in assuring continous improvement, alternative assessment tools should be used whenever possible. Without these tools, teachers can not accurately measure student learning using innovative curriculum and instruction.

The *organization* of the Accelerated School should be characterized by broad participation in decision-making by administrators, teachers, and parents. Interested members of the school community should participate in problem-solving task forces, which we call "cadres," that focus on different facets of school renewal. Moreover, central offices should support these activities. The figure below depicts this comprehensive approach to change.



Curriculum

language across subjects
higher order skills
related to experience
common curricular objectives
interdisciplinary/thematic
equitable content coverage
full range of electives
exploratory coursework

Instruction

active learning
primary sources
projects
peer tutoring
cooperative learning
educational technology
alternative assessment
heterogeneous grouping

Organization

collaborative decision-making
parents in partnership
flexible scheduling
faculty committees for inquiry
central office staff collaboration
principal as facilitator
articulation with other schooling levels

An Accelerated School should aim to meet all the varied needs of its students. These needs include academic, social, emotional, language and self-esteem needs. Accelerated Schools do not siphon children off into special education or gifted and talented programs. Rather, Accelerated Schools' staff work to create a cohesive school community where students want to be – schools with heterogeneous, accelerated instruction for all. We have found that when student needs are met, that the needs of parents, staff and administration are met as well.

FOUNDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING SCHOOLS

Becoming an Accelerated School is an ambitious undertaking which entails transforming the way administrators, teachers, and parents think about school. Clearly such a transformation suggests systemic change in school culture and practice (Cuban 1988). Understanding and applying the principles of acceleration to everyday life of the school is the first step in the process.

Accelerated Principles

The Accelerated Schools model is constructed on three guiding principles and a set of fundamental values underlying those principles which are necessary to establish the curricular, instructional, and organizational changes. Active practice of the three principles – unity of purpose, empowerment/responsibility, and building on strengths – and the values on which they are based can serve as vehicles to becoming an Accelerated School.

Unity of purpose refers to agreement among parents, teachers, students, and administrators on a common set of goals for the school that will be the focal point of everyone's efforts. Clearly, the unity of purpose should focus on bringing children into the educational mainstream so that they can fully benefit from their further schooling experiences and adult opportunities. The all inclusive process of defining a common purpose is extremely important in and of itself. By including all of the parties from the start who are involved in either the planning and design of educational programs, the implementation of those programs, and/or the evaluation of those programs, one can ensure more cohesive educational efforts and a greater commitment to those efforts. Unity of purpose stands in contrast to disjointed planning, implementation and evaluation of educational programs, where various members of the school community have different educational goals.

In defining a unity of purpose, the school community should take care to create active goals that provide opportunities for daily practice rather than passive goals, which are little more than words on paper. The unity of purpose should also encourage various parties to work together in the educational process. Finally, the unity of purpose, in the form of a vision statement, serves as an organizing framework for all curricular, instructional, and organizational endeavors. Schools will use the vision statement as an ultimate goal toward which all decisions will be aimed.

Empowerment /Responsibility refers to the ability of the key participants of a school community in the school and at home to (1) make important educational decisions, (2) take responsibility for implementing those decisions, and (3) take responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions. The purpose is to break the present stalemate among administrators, teachers, parents, and students in which the participants tend to blame each other as well as other factors "beyond their control" for the poor educational outcomes of students. Unless all of the major actors can be empowered to seek a common set of goals and influence the educational and social processes to realize those goals, it is unlikely that the desired improvements will take place or be sustained.

An Accelerated School must build an expanded role for all groups to participate in and take responsibility for the educational process and educational results. Such an approach requires a shift to a school-based decision approach with heavy involvement of teachers and parents and new administrative roles.

Building on strengths refers to utilizing all of the learning resources that students, parents, school staff, and communities bring to the educational endeavor. In the quest to place blame for the lack of efficacy of schools in improving the education students at-risk, it is easy to exaggerate weaknesses of the various participants and ignore strengths. Parents have considerable strengths in serving as positive influences for the education of their children, not the least of which are a deep love for their children and a desire for their children to succeed. Parents have the potential to help teachers better understand their children and to help motivate their children to learn. Teachers are capable of insights, intuition, teaching, and organizational acumen that are lost when schools exclude teachers from participating in the decisions they must implement. Both parents and teachers are largely underutilized sources of talent in the schools.

The strengths of at-risk students are often overlooked because these students are perceived as lacking the learning behaviors associated with middle-class students rather than as having unique and different assets which can be used to accelerate their learning. Schools overlook the strengths of these students in a variety of ways. First, teachers often find themselves underprepared to understand the culture and values of poor, minority, immigrant, and non-English speaking students. These students have many strengths though they may be different from

those valued by a predominantly white middle class culture. Educators must work to understand cultural differences and build upon them as strengths.

In addition to rich cultural diversity, another untapped resource in our schools is the many styles of learning *all* children bring with them to school. Schools typically focus on traditional lecture and "book learning" strategies, yet there are many other ways to learn – orally, kinesthetically, artistically, etc. While all students could benefit from a wider variety of teaching strategies, students at-risk may be especially alienated by a heavy emphasis on the traditional "book learning" strategies since the books schools use rarely reflect any of these students' experiences. Moreover, the conventional lecture style does not offer students intrinsically interesting ways of learning. Other learning strengths can include an interest and curiosity in oral and artistic expression, abilities to learn through the manipulation of appropriate materials, a capability for engrossment in intrinsically interesting tasks, and the ability to learn to write before attaining competence in decoding skills which are prerequisite to reading. In addition, students with varied learning styles can serve as enthusiastic and effective learning resources for other students through peer tutoring and cooperative learning approaches (Slavin 1983).

School-based administrators are also underutilized. They are often placed in "command" roles and asked to meet the directives and standard-operating-procedures of districts rather than to work creatively with parents, staff, and students. And, communities have considerable resources including youth organizations, senior citizens, businesses, and religious groups that should be viewed as major assets for the schools and the children of the community. The strengths of all of these participants can be viewed as a major set of resources for creating Accelerated Schools.

Accelerated Values

Underlying the accelerated principles and practices are a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes which are necessary to create the culture for accelerated school change. The following values, attitudes, and beliefs are clearly interrelated:

- *equity*: All students can learn and have an equal right to a high quality education.
- *participation*: Students participate in learning; teachers participate in decision-making; parents participate in school decision-making.
- *communication/community*: Students engage in more active and group learning. School staff and community work toward a shared purpose by meeting, talking, and learning from each others' experiences.
- *reflection*: Students engage in problem-solving exercises and more interpretive approaches to curricula. Teachers and other adults constantly scrutinize the world of the school and address challenges to school improvement.
- *experimentation*: Students are involved in discovery exercises. Teachers implement experimental programs as a result of communicating about and reflecting upon the school's problems.
- *trust*: Teachers, parents, administrators and students must believe in each other and focus on each other's strengths.
- *risk-taking*: All parties must be more entrepreneurial in their efforts. While some new programs may fail, the ones that succeed are the keys to lasting school improvement.

Many of the values described above stem from the work of John Dewey, who believed that a democratic education implies faith in the potential of both children and adults to understand, and to some extent, shape the world around them (Dewey 1988). Individuals begin to realize this potential, Dewey argues, when, as members of groups, they take active roles in *inquiring into shared problems* (Dewey 1984). This process of collaborative Inquiry serves as a model for the governance of an Accelerated School as well as for the curricular, instructional, and organizational practices.

GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

Existing schools can be transformed structurally by moving decision-making to school sites, but they will not truly function as Accelerated Schools without building the capacity of the schools to establish a unity of purpose, to make responsible decisions, and to build on strengths. The Inquiry Process is a mechanism for moving the school toward accelerated practice along all three dimensions of the triangle (curriculum, instruction, and organization). Through the Inquiry Process, teachers, administrators, and parents identify and define educational challenges, look for alternative solutions, and implement and evaluate those solutions. The entire process can take up to a full school year because it entails a wide range of issues which touch upon all facets of the school – on culture as well as pedagogical practices. Before delving into schoolwide challenges using the Inquiry Process, there are four important steps a school must take to initiate the Accelerated Schools process.

Initiating the Accelerated Schools Process

Initiating the Accelerated Schools process can be accomplished in four steps. These four steps should take at least three weeks to accomplish – some of the steps will involve full-time attention, while others can be accomplished as part of the normal course of the school day. In the first step, the school *takes stock* of "where it is." The school community gathers quantitative and qualitative information on the history of the school; data on students, staff, and school facilities; information on the community and cultures of the parents; particular strengths of the school; data on attendance, disaggregated test scores, and other measures of student performance; and the major challenges faced by the school. The process of collecting, reporting, and discussing the baseline information will take several weeks of research, compilation, and discussion. This self-examination provides a useful record of the school's status at the start to compare later with progress. Some schools might even want to consider creating a time capsule out of the baseline information expressly for the purpose of regular comparison with present and baseline situations. It is important that the entire school community actively participates in gathering the baseline data so that participants will begin to develop a sense of ownership over the process.

The second step in initiating the Accelerated Schools Process is to *establish a vision* for the school that will be the focus of change. Again, the entire school community should engage in creating a vision – including teachers, principal,

parents, central office administrators, the community, and students. It is crucial for all parties who will be involved in the planning, implementation, and/or evaluation of educational programs to be included in this process. The all inclusive nature of defining a vision results in ownership of a common goal and long-term commitment to achieving that goal. The process of discussing individual dreams for the school could also help foster student-adult, parent-child, and school personnel-parent bonding.

The school community will create the vision in a series of both small and large meetings, where the participants focus on imagining and describing a school that will work for students, staff, and community. In this step, the school community asks itself, "What knowledge, skills, and attributes do we want our students to have when they leave our school?" Alternatively, a school community members could ask themselves, "What kind of school would I want to send my child to?" or "What do we want our school to look like in five-six years?" We suggest five-six years, because it takes time to transform a school, although significant changes will occur during the first year. Out of this series of discussions, a vision for the future will emerge – a vision which will be the focus of Accelerated School implementation. If the school community prepares for the creation of a shared vision by discussing elements of their personal visions informally over a couple of weeks beforehand, this phase of the process can be carried out in a one or two-day meeting.

The third step involves the *comparison of the vision with the baseline information*. Clearly, there will be a large gap in many aspects between the vision and the existing situation. The school community must synthesize and compile all of the things that must be done in order to move from the present situation to the future vision. They may amass a very large number of changes that must be made, often 40-50 major alterations.

In the fourth step, the school community takes the list of what needs to be accomplished and *reduces it to three or four initial priorities* which will become the immediate focus of the school. An organization rarely can work effectively on more than three or four major priorities at a time. This exercise may generate a very animated set of discussions that gets to the heart of staff concerns. The dynamics of the discourse are themselves useful because they help the staff realize that they are responsible for change and for choosing those areas where they must begin. The agreement on priorities is followed by the *establishment of the first cadres* – the small groups that will work on these priorities – and assignment of staff to each

group, usually through self-selection. The final activity is that of deciding how to construct the steering committee and its functions. At this point the school is ready to begin working on its priority areas adopting the full Accelerated School process. Before describing Inquiry at the cadre level, we will describe the Accelerated School governance structure necessary to support regular Inquiry.

Accelerated School Governance

The governance of an Accelerated School is built upon the three guiding principles: The *unity of purpose* (vision created above) gives the governance groups clear goals toward which to organize their work. The principle of *building on strengths* acknowledges that teachers, parents, students, and administrators have unique strengths which can complement and further build on each other in the transformation to an Accelerated School. The principle of *empowerment* places the responsibility for education back at the school site in the hands of all involved. Indeed, at the heart of the Accelerated School is the emphasis on site responsibility for the educational process and outcomes. This implies that there must be an appropriate decision-making structure built around the school's unity of purpose.

Described below are the school governance structures which should be in place in order to begin collaborative Inquiry at the cadre level. We have found that three levels of participation are necessary to encompass the range of issues that must be addressed in an a democratic, but productive way: cadres; a steering committee; and the school-as-a-whole.

Cadres are the small groups organized around the school's particular areas of challenge (determined in Step 4 above) where the school's present situation falls short of its vision. These areas could be: family involvement, mathematics, assessment, scheduling, or any other school challenge. Where the challenge is a continuing one, such as curricular assessment or family involvement, a continuing cadre is formed. In the case where the challenge is episodic, such as the planning of new facilities, an ad hoc cadre is formed for the duration of the task. In any case, the cadres analyze and solve problems using the Inquiry Process. They systematically define specific problems that the school faces and search for and implement solutions. Cadres are constituted by those who self-select to serve on them during the setting priorities stage above.

The *Steering Committee* consists of the principal and representative teachers, aides, other school staff, students and parents. Steering committee members can be elected, or they can be composed of representatives of the cadres with rotating membership over time to give all persons a chance to serve. The Steering Committee serves at least four purposes. First, it serves to ensure that cadres continually move in the direction of the school vision. Second, it serves as a clearinghouse of information so that cadres communicate and do not operate in isolation. Third, the steering committee ensures that cadres stay on track with the Inquiry Process. Finally, the steering committee monitors the progress of the cadres and helps develop a set of recommendations for consideration by the school-as-a-whole.

School as a Whole refers to the principal, teachers, teachers' aides, other instructional and non-instructional staff, and parent representatives as well as student representatives. The school as a whole is required to approve all major decisions on curriculum, instruction, and resource allocation that have implications for the entire school. The school as a whole must approve decisions before cadres begin implementation of experimental programs.

The Inquiry Process

As introduced above, cadres take on overall challenges identified by the school community, such as poor mathematics performance of students, and use the Inquiry Process to work toward a solutions to those challenges. Inquiry cadres identify the particular problem at the heart of the challenge area, brainstorm potential solutions, synthesize those solutions, pilot experimental programs, and evaluate those programs.

The Inquiry Process differs from the after-school and one-day staff development stints that school staff typically receive in three major ways. First, Inquiry provides an outlet for school staff to look into challenge areas of *their* choosing in an in-depth manner, rather than looking into district or state priorities in a surface manner. Second, Inquiry encourages the school community to produce knowledge as well as to transmit it – building on the many strengths at the school site. Third, Inquiry empowers those at the school site to make the changes they know are best for students (Polkinghorn, Bartels & Levin 1990). It is important to note that Inquiry will lead different schools in extremely different directions since Inquiry is the vehicle schools use to achieve their vision, which will be, by definition, unique to their school community.

The cadre will work through the Inquiry Process in five phases. Because the Inquiry Process necessitates reflection, working through the Inquiry Process can take anywhere from a week to a full school year depending on the challenge area. A challenge such as mathematics achievement is likely to take more time than one such as facilities usage. In any case, the benefits of spending this time seem to outweigh the cost of the time, in that schools end up choosing solutions that are carefully tailored to their particular challenge areas – solutions which move the school community closer to its vision. The five stages of the Inquiry Process are:

STAGE 1: FOCUS IN ON THE REAL PROBLEM In the first stage, the cadre must refine the broad challenge area so that they can understand the specific concerns surrounding the challenge. Cadres should translate broad concerns into specific hypotheses that seek to explain the broad concern. For example, if low family involvement were a broad concern, a specific hypothesis to explain the concern might be that the students' parents who were not involved were not actually biological parents – that is, they may be aunts, grandmothers, etc., who may have less time for or commitment to the students. Cadres should set out as many hypotheses as they can and then seek to test the hypotheses in order to focus more sharply on the particular problem at hand. As a result of the hypothesizing and exploring, each cadre should create a specific and organizing question which can guide the group's work throughout the Inquiry. If it turned out that the hypothesis about non-biological parents was not actually the problem, but the lack of parental involvement in the academic work of their children was, then the question might be, "How can we better involve students parents and/or guardians in the academic work of their children?" Taking the time to hone in on the real problem will ensure that all other cadre efforts in Stages 2-5 yield the maximum benefit.

STAGE 2: BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS In stage two, the groups seek out possible solutions for addressing the specific concern identified in stage one by looking inwards at their own situation and outwards to the experiences and practices of others. This second stage is simply a brainstorming stage where any idea goes.

STAGE 3: SYNTHESIZE SOLUTIONS INTO AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM In stage three, the cadres look critically at the solutions they brainstormed and decide which one(s) best address their organizing question and will most likely carry them toward their vision. The cadre synthesizes the possible solutions into a plan for an experimental program molded to the school's special needs.

STAGE 4: PILOT TEST PROGRAM In stage four, after an experimental program receives the support of the steering committee and school-as-a-whole, the school implements the program on a pilot basis.

STAGE 5: EVALUATE AND REASSESS In stage five, the school evaluates the pilot program to determine whether it addressed the organizing question effectively. At the end of this process, members of the school community choose either to continue working on this issue or to select another piece of the vision on which they wish to work.

Aids to adopting the Inquiry Process and Accelerated Governance Structure

Taking on the Inquiry Process and setting up the governance structures to support the process may represent new territory for school communities. School staff have neither been trained to function in this way, nor have they been expected to function this way in traditional schools. Although much of the capability needed to become an Accelerated School comes directly from practice or experimentation; school communities will become experts at the process as they work at it.

At this point, staff in our pilot schools have internalized the Inquiry Process governance so that it is a regular part of their professional lives. Three sets of activities have helped these schools take on this process which originally represented a radical departure from practice – time, group decision-making skills, and meeting standards. First, these schools worked creatively with their districts and even with the state to find *time*. Moreover, they worked to find time on a continuing basis, rather than a single chunk at the beginning or end of the year. Many Accelerated Schools have found significant amounts of time by combining related responsibilities and dissolving committees that were no longer needed. For example, the Accelerated School governance meetings have replaced some of the more conventional staff meetings rather than being held in addition to them. Other strategies include: creating early release days by elongating other days, buying substitute time, setting up creative and flexible scheduling, extending teacher contracts, staying after school periodically, and setting up special events days.

Secondly, the school staff have discovered that they functioned more productively as a group after improving their *group decision-making skills*. School staff have traditionally operated in isolation from each other and have not been allowed to make major educational decisions about curriculum, instruction or organization. Meetings in traditional schools tend to be highly structured and run in a routine and often authoritarian fashion. School staff rarely view meetings as

having the potential to be productive and to accomplish major goals in behalf of the school. Accordingly, the school staff needed experience in working together with special attention to group process and participation, sharing of information, and working towards decisions. Indeed school communities that think about becoming Accelerated Schools often request to receive training in group decision-making. Another strategy for building school capacity to self-govern is for school governance groups to work with a facilitator or to collaborate with a third party. These individuals can provide objective advice and additional expertise.

Thirdly, the schools have realized their need to set up a new set of meeting standards. In an Accelerated School, the school governance groups meet and communicate with each other on a regular basis. Cadres meet on a weekly basis, the steering committee on a bi-weekly basis, and the school-as-a-whole on a quarterly basis or as needed. Meetings of all entities require a public display of agendas in advance of meetings and minutes of meetings within a reasonable time following the meeting. These meetings began to build a sense of comaraderie, ease of communication, and a source of motivation sparked by teams of people working together on a regular basis.

NEW ROLES FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Earlier in this paper, we discussed the new roles of teachers and parents in the Accelerated School. Clearly, the administrators – both in the school and in the central office – will play different roles from those they have in more conventional school districts. In an Accelerated School, the principal must move from the role of compliance officer to that of a leader whose first priority is to be involved in the educational process. An Accelerated School principal is responsible for coordinating and facilitating the activities of the school community's decision-making as well as for obtaining the logistical support in the form of information, staff development, assessment, implementation, and instructional resources. A good principal in the context of the Accelerated School is one who is an active listener and participant, who can identify and cultivate talents among staff, who can keep the school focussed on its mission, who can work effectively with parents and community, who is dedicated to the students and their success, who can motivate the various actors, who can marshal the resources that are necessary, and who is "the keeper of the dream." In the last role, the principal is the person who must always remind participants of the "dream" especially during periods of temporary disappointments or setbacks.

Individual schools can certainly make significant strides toward their vision, but without the active support of the school district, individual schools will be unlikely to be able to operate in a truly accelerated fashion. School districts must play a greater service role for individual schools than they normally do if schools are to reach their ultimate visions. Instead of serving as regulators of schools with rules, mandates, and policies to ensure compliance of school activities with some centralized plan, administrators in central offices must provide support services to help Accelerated Schools achieve their visions. Central office staff must regularly work with those at the school site in a variety of ways. For example, central office staff can assist cadres and the steering committee in identifying challenges, obtaining information on alternatives, implementing pilot programs, obtaining staff development, and conducting evaluations. Central office staff can also work with schools to design the much needed alternative assessment tools. Central office personnel can also assist the schools in working with parents and helping families sponsor activities that support educational progress of their children in the home.

While inner city and poor rural schools definitely need considerable additional resources (Levin 1989), these schools can begin to make significant changes by shifting the use of existing resources. Central office administrators can also work with schools to devise ways of providing additional released time of staff for meetings, staff development, discussion, reflection, planning, and exploration of alternatives. Schools must be more creative with existing budgets and work hard to obtain additional funds through grants and donations from the community. Our pilot schools have been successful in re-arranging existing budgets, using various school district resources, obtaining small grants from foundations, enlisting the time of community members, and changing school organization to provide additional time and resources.

Timeframe for Acceleration and Outcomes thus far

In the last two years of the project, we have observed many encouraging outcomes, even though we believe the change process will occur over a five-six year period for each school. Early indicators show increases in student achievement. For example, our pilot school in San Francisco had the largest increase in language achievement and the second largest increase in mathematics achievement among the 72 elementary schools in that city. Our pilot in Redwood City, California improved its mathematics achievement from the 10th to the 27th percentile. An Accelerated School in the Houston, Texas area raised student achievement in all

subject areas by substantial amounts. An Accelerated School in Fairbanks, Missouri exhibited the most dramatic improvements in achievement of all elementary schools in that city.

The schools have also enjoyed spectacular increases in parent participation. For example, the year prior to the initiation of the Accelerated School process, only 17 parents showed up for the back-to-school night at one pilot school. By the begining of the third year, 450 persons attended the same event. Participation in parent conferences increased from 30 percent to 95 percent during the same period. Parents actively participate in school site decisions, parenting programs, and academic events in Accelerated Schools.

Student retentions and discipline problems have declined and attendance patterns have improved. School staff report substantial improvements in the school environment, which they attribute to their active involvement in curricular and instructional decisions. For example, one staff chose mathematics as a priority area for schoolwide inquiry and implemented an experimental program for students in the upper grades. Students in the program improved their mathematics performance by at least one grade level. Other inquiry efforts have led to innovative language, family involvement, and self-esteem programs.